



Speech by

Mr N. ROBERTS

MEMBER FOR NUDGE

Hansard 28 October 1999

MINISTER FOR MINES AND ENERGY

Mr ROBERTS (Nudgee—ALP) (6.41 p.m.): The electricity industry structure that was put in place by the former coalition Government was clearly set up to privatise the industry. Why else would it have fractured the industry into small saleable parts? As a result of that policy, the Government owned corporations were forced to focus on financial performance and profitability at the expense of customer safety and reliability of supply. In February 1998, power station breakdowns resulted in load shedding, widespread economic losses and social disruption. Who can forget the deceit of the previous Minister in keeping potential power shortages secret from the people of Queensland?

As a result, when it came to office, the Beattie Government committed itself to an independent audit of generation maintenance in the GOCs to provide appropriate steps to minimise the risk of future power outages. Mr Ron McGuigan, formally the CEO of CS Energy, was commissioned to undertake this independent audit, which identified a number of key problems. All of the maintenance identified as being of a high priority has been eliminated under this Government.

To ensure that maintenance problems do not recur, the Government has ensured the establishment of an Electricity Monitoring Unit within the Department of Mines and Energy. One of the primary duties of this unit will be to oversee the continued implementation of sound maintenance procedures and to ensure an ongoing audit of maintenance practices in the industry.

The Government has also recognised that there is a scope for improvement to network reliability by both electricity distribution corporations. Whilst many outages are the result of storms and animal and bird contact, it is important to ensure that the distribution system is maintained at a high standard to minimise supply interruptions. In recognition of the need to continuously improve reliability levels, the distribution corporations have increased their 1999-2000 budgets. Emphasis has been placed on increasing preventive maintenance such as vegetation management and pole maintenance so that emergency maintenance in future years can be reduced.

The Government also places priority on ensuring high standards of employee and public safety associated with the electricity industry. In fact, the Government has already taken a number of significant steps to upgrade safety standards. Both the Department of Mines and Energy and the distribution corporations are taking leading roles in the promotion of electrical safety in the community.

For example, this year Energex is implementing a number of major safety initiatives aimed at improving electrical safety awareness and promoting the safe use of electricity. Those initiatives include a \$500,000 television and print safety education campaign targeting the major causes of injuries and deaths from electricity. Ergon is also undertaking investigations into its maintenance status and safety issues as a part of its ongoing improvement program. Specifically, Ergon has undertaken safety planning, risk assessments, training consultation and workplace inspections and audits.

As a part of the Government's program, the Department of Mines and Energy regularly undertakes field audits of Energex and Ergon distribution networks to ensure their compliance with electrical safety standards. The Government has responded to claims by Mr Keith Stenhouse, a former director of Energex, about the general safety and maintenance practices of Energex. Mr Stenhouse has indicated a willingness to provide material and information on his claims to assist a Government investigation team. That team comprises Mr Ron McGuigan of McGuigan and Associates and Mr Dick Williams, an official of the Electrical Trades Union. The team has been selected by the Government to

examine safety reports and associated issues in relation to the maintenance of Energex's electrical lines following some of the allegations by Mr Stenhouse. The Government and the industry take responsibility for electrical maintenance and safety very seriously. Indeed, the maintenance of world-class levels of reliability and safety within the industry is a major priority for the Government. I oppose the motion moved by the member for Hinchinbrook.
